

# THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

## Typology of Choral Music in Ghana: Current Perspectives

Joshua Alfred Amuah

Lecturer, Department of Music, School of Performing Arts, University of Ghana

### Abstract:

*This paper introduces a new typology of choral music composition in Ghana. It investigates and analyses previous typologies of choral music compositional styles and synchronizes the efforts presented by earlier scholars since the introduction of choral art music composition in Ghana. Through a critical music analysis of compositional styles and a thoughtful observation of previous typologies, the author reveals a new dimension of choral music typology to incorporate traditional choral styles that have been abandoned in the previous typologies. The paper further seeks to incorporate the current choral music compositional fashions to present a survey of choral music compositional styles for the younger generation choral music composers to emulate or diversify.*

**Key words:** choral composition, typology, music, Ghana, analysis, traditional

### 1. Introduction

In this paper, the use of Amu's style, as examined by Nketia in 1974, is discussed with the view to a re-evaluation, seeking to offer a wider typology of Ghanaian choral musical styles to embrace traditional choral music styles. The paper also comments on the efforts of Misonu Amu<sup>1</sup>, and Timothy Andoh<sup>2</sup>, who address aspects of Nketia's typology. The paper further explains this new model of typology with regard to the current trends in choral music composition.

Nketia 1974, considering the compositional styles from the onset attempted a typology of choral music. Misonu and Andoh have commented on Nketia's typology and have given their estimation in their M. Phil theses presented to the University of Ghana in 1988 and 1993 respectively. Twenty one years after Nketia's typology in 1974, and following Misonu in 1988 and Andoh in 1993, I present a broader typology based on Nketia, Misonu and Andoh. The suggestion of a new typology is not to replace Nketia's effort but to include the potency and existence of traditional choral musical styles. It is also as a result of new trends in compositional styles that have been adopted by the younger generation of choral music composers that cannot be located in Nketia's typology.

### 2. Nketia's Typology

Nketia's typology is based on formal and generic trends of the musical characteristics within an already Africanized context. He identifies five formal types: The Amu model, The Traditional model, The YaaAmponsah (Highlife) model, Later Highlife model and the Institutional Model.

#### 2.1. The Amu Model

According to Nketia (1974:5) The Amu model characterizes Amu's personal style and may well be designated as Amu's model because of the originality of the manner in which he treats it. The model breaks away from the basic principles of voice separation in traditional music by using the framework of S.A.T.B or T.T.B.B and four-part harmony in combination with African rhythm in which he often describes the predomination of "alternating duple and triple effects."

#### 2.2. The Traditional Model

This model which constitutes the second category of Nketia's typology is inspired by the first of the three levels of musical practice in contemporary Africa: the traditional, the popular and the art music. The traditional model is the exploration of traditional music elements which are arranged to blend with western harmonic principles. Nketia (1974) discusses two kinds of this model; the Asafo<sup>3</sup> type and the Ebibindwom<sup>4</sup> (Akan Sacred Lyric) type. Misonu (1988) adds a third style within the

<sup>1</sup>daughter of Ephraim Amu and research fellow in African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon

<sup>2</sup>lecturer, Department of Music, University of Ghana

<sup>3</sup> An ancient warrior organization that exists in all Akan societies of Ghana

traditional model, which uses Egbenegba and Gabada<sup>5</sup> Recreational musical types of the Volta Region Recreational musical types of the Volta Region. In the Asafo form, Nketia says “a rousing cry by a cantor or a group singing in unison is followed by a chorus response in the form of a shout or yell, or a short phrase. The main body of the song follows this introductory statement”. (Nketia 1974:6) Examples of this are Gaddiel R. Acquah’s }sabarimba (Warrior), Amu’s Onyame ne Sahene (God is the Captain of our host) and YaanomAbibrimma (Sons of Africa). Other examples are Riverson’s “God Bless Ghana”, and KunyimdziAb[n Homndzi d[w (Victory is Nigh; Rejoice). In utilizing this model in compositions, the composers give an introductory opening of a rousing cry by a cantor or a group singing in unison, responded to by a chorus, in a form of a shout or yell, or a short phrase. This introductory declaration is then followed by the main body of the song in four-part harmony. This style is explicitly expressed in all the examples given.

### 2.3. The Highlife Model

This model which constitutes the third category in Nketia’s typology is inspired by the second of the three levels of musical practice in contemporary Africa: the popular level classified by Nketia as the highlife model.

Highlife is described by Coplan (1978) as “a syncretic form in that it modifies and integrates both Western and indigenous musical elements into an organic, qualitatively new style that retains expressive continuity with the traditional music system. As a syncretic, expressive sub system, highlife transmits Western influences and values into a rapidly emerging urban sociocultural system”. (Coplan 1978:97)

According to Nketia, it is also a combination of dance and music that grew along the coastal lines of West Africa as indicated earlier. It drew inspiration from military band music that was played on various occasions during the colonial days. Two varieties of the highlife can be enumerated in Ghana; the first one based on the simple variety in the standard simple duple or simple quadruple time, and the slower variety popularly known as the “blues” but without the lowered third (blue note) (Nketia 1974:7). Compositions under this category are written in keeping with the characteristics of the highlife musical genre.

YaaAmponsa, a popular Ghanaian Highlife tune normally in simple duple and occasionally combining with triple meter resulting in the hemiola<sup>6</sup> effect, has been the source of development for this musical genre. Ephraim Amu has been an exponent of this rhythm and has employed it in some of his compositions. Some of the compositions that contain the hemiola effects are: Y[n araasaaseni (This is our own land), Enn[ y[Anigye Da (This is a pleasant day). Other Ghanaian composers who exploited the use of this rhythm are Otto Boateng in his Y[y[AheneBaasa (We are three kings), and Joseph T.Essuman in his K]nk]nsa (Fabrication), Samuel. K. Gyapong in his WoawoAgyenkwa (A saviour is born), Ernest C. Bilson in his Tweramp]nNyame (Mighty God). As a result of the simplicity and gay nature of the highlife music in relation to its chordal and melodic progressions, it has been very simple to accommodate. It has been very attractive to many composers especially the younger ones whose intention is to write in assistance with the retention of membership in the church especially in the Methodist church. Examples of such songs are: Kras Arthur’s Nyamey[ }sahen (God is a warrior - king), and James Tesmafo Arthur’s Idzin a ]y[Nwanwa (That wonderful name).

It has been the norm for highlife to be written without any modulation by most composers. Amu resisted modulations, always composing without them, because he believed that there are no modulations in African music. Some advanced composers, however, like Amissah and Entsua-Mensah modulated to the dominant and back to the tonic in their compositions. The extended forms of the highlife model of Entsua-Mensah made use of non-harmonic tones like the passing tones, auxiliaries and other decorative figures as well as chromaticism. Entsua-Mensah, who is associated with chromaticism is noted for writing his highlife pieces in binary form, modulating to the dominant in the first section and passing through other related keys to the dominant and finally returning to the tonic. This style is manifested in his compositions Mmer[ (Time), Ghana Wimuh[n (Ghana Airways) and EnyigyeNtrado (Excessive Happiness).

The other version of the highlife, the slower version has KwesiBaiden and Entsua-Mensah as the renowned composers. In the current era, composers like John G. Koomson, James Tsemafo Arthur, Yaw SekyiBaidoo, Kras Arthur and George Mensah Essilfie among others have also written in this dimension. The only difference between the standard highlife and the slower version is in the time signature and the motivic structures as well as rhythmic figures that are employed. Whilst the standard version of the highlife model is in simple duple or quadruple time, the slower version is in compound duple. The harmonic structures of both versions, however, remain the same.

Examples of the slower version are KwesiBaiden’sMinsi d[n menkamfoWo (How should I praise you), Kras Arthur’s Hom ma y[n som No (Let us worship Him), George Mensah Essilfie’sKanbr[br[ (Take it calmly), Yaw SekyiBaidoo’sEnyigyes[m (Good News), John G.Koomson’sMam’ Gyedzintsaban (Give me the wings of faith), James Tsemafo Arthur’s S[meba Jesus h] a (When I come to Jesus).

### 3. Nketia’s Typology: An Assessment by Misonu

Misonu’s approach refers to Amu’s Nationalism and grammatical departure from the western anthem: indigenization of rhythm and emphasis on the idiomatic tone-tune relationship with neutralization of modulatory processes.

Misonu indicates that “the influence of Amu’s pioneering effort has been far reaching. With the introduction of this new style of writing, he has inspired many musicians to cultivate and exploit this new type of music, thus opening an avenue for a new generation of musicians who have composed and taught their own brand of choral music as well as teaching many

<sup>4</sup>A traditional song used in Christian worship specifically in the Methodist Church-Ghana

<sup>5</sup>Recreational musical types of the Volta Region

<sup>6</sup>An alternation of duple and triple effects

others could lay hands on” (Misonu 1988:20). The subsequent effort of other Ghanaian composers to write their music has been deeply influenced by Ephraim Amu’s influence. This practice however was not cultivated by all Ghanaian musicians. For example in the Central and the Western Regions a group of musicians rose up who composed in their own style. Examples of these composers are Charles Graves, Bessa Simons, Jman GhanBlankson, Samuel M.H.B Yarney, and Ernest C. Bilson who wrote hymns in the four-part homophony and occasionally with descant tunes. Misonu’s examination of contemporary Ghanaian choral music reveals various types that have arisen since 1920. Misonu merges YaaAmponsa and Later Highlife models claiming that the two resemble each other in characteristics such as form and rhythm while Nketia differentiates the two based on the fact that YaaAmponsa is based on or derived from popular songs. (Misonu 1988:21) Later Highlife is derived from popular dance music which draws on a number of standardized melodic and harmonic forms and rhythmic usages derived from Caribbean, African and American practice. Misonu therefore advocates for only three choral music models.

#### **4. Nketia’s Typology: Andoh’s Perception**

Andoh features functionalist and exegetic labels based on encyclopedic glosses: Anthem, Choral, and Vocal. Andoh acknowledges Nketia’s typology but expresses disagreement with the use of the term “Choral Anthem” since both of its constituent words refer to compositions for multiple voices. Instead, he suggests that the “Choral Anthem” model should be renamed “Choral model” or the “Anthem model.” (Andoh 1993:19)

#### **5. My Review of the Three Earlier Typologies**

After a careful consideration of the typologies from the three scholars I offer the following comments; In the first place, I concur with Misonu on her fusion of the highlife and the later highlife models because the two are of no vast differences. I also agree with Andoh on the use of either ‘Anthem’ or ‘Choral’. I base my discussion of Ghanaian vocal music in view of the fact that the terms “choral” and “anthem” both involve multiple voices, and can be sacred or secular depending on the group that is performing, as well as the performance context. Once again Andoh in his submission of the typology of choral music in Ghana points out yet another model which was not captured by Nketia. He identifies the “Picnic model.” He says “This type is used mainly for processions or ‘picnics’ and is usually sung to the accompaniment of a brass band, thus the name ‘Picnic’ model.” (Andoh ibid 24) He further characterized the picnic model as a model that uses melodic practices resulting from the long association of the church hymn with most Ghanaian composers, choirmasters and organists, consistent use of the simple quadruple time, modulations from tonic to dominant and back to tonic, and the refrain which is present to speed up the movement of the song.”

I also contribute that the “Picnic model” is also dominated with call and response structures. After Riverson and KwesiBaiden, pioneer exponents, Kras Arthur and SekyiBaidoo have since taken over this model. Examples are Riverson’s MfehaNd]mba (Centenary bells), KwesiBaiden’s Mfe}ha Eduonum Afahy[Ndwom (One fiftieth Anniversary Song), Kras Arthur’s Mfe}ha EduosuoNdwom (One Hundred and Seventieth Anniversary Song). Although I heartily recognize Andoh’s intention for identifying yet another model, I will however beg to differ from Andoh’s submission. I will rather categorize the “Picnic model” under the highlife model initially identified by Nketia, since they convey the same melodic, rhythmic and harmonic features as identified by Nketia. The highlife model identified by Nketia can equally be accompanied by the brass and be used for “picnics”.

#### **6. My Typology of Ghanaian Choral Music**

In as much as I agree partially with Nketia, Misonu and Andoh, I also want to propose a new typology based on what the above scholars have already identified and what is pertaining to the Ghanaian society today, incorporating traditional musical styles to create a broader perspective of a typology of Ghanaian choral music. I will rather classify choral music in Ghana under two broad headings: “The Traditional Choral” which I will re-label “The African Choral” not to interfere with Nketia’s Traditional Model, and the “The Art Choral.” The “African Choral” will consist of Traditional (African) choral styles that existed before Art music was introduced in Ghana. The second main type would therefore comprise all that had been diluted upon based on the submissions made by Nketia, Misonu and Andoh and a fourth model to be introduced. In the preceding section of the paper I have notified my readers about Dor’s submission on “art choral” music as well as elaborated upon the traditional choral styles.

It is on the strength of this presentation that these two main types are being instituted. One may question whether there is harmony in the “African Choral” songs to meet the criteria as a type of choral music since choral music is also a two or more part genre, but I want to conclude that before formal European four-part writing was introduced in Ghana, Africans naturally achieved voice separation in their songs using thirds, sixths and octaves (Dor: 2005).

#### **7. Introducing a Fourth Model of Art Choral Music**

I further wish to introduce a fourth model of Art Choral Music with regard to the trend and style of some compositions of the relatively younger composers in Ghana. The fourth model which I wish to label Contemporary Model receives its potency from existing Popular/Gospel music. It is related to the “Traditional Model” (identified by Nketia) which has been arranged or developed out of an existing traditional music source as in the case of Amisah’s BobueSorNtokura (Open the Windows of Heaven) which has been arranged from an existing Ebibindwom. The difference stems from the fact that while the “Traditional Model” uses traditional (music) material as a pre-compositional resource, the “Contemporary model” uses an existing Popular/Gospel, or Classical music material as the pre-compositional resource. This model splits into two types: “The Highlife type” which I wish to rename the Short form so as not to confuse it with the YaaAmponsa/Highlife model and “the Anthem type” which I wish to re-label the Extended form also to enable it to stand distinct from the “Anthem model”. I have chosen to go by these designations so as to present the new labels free from interferences.

7.1. *The Short Form of the Contemporary model*

In the “Short form” type, the composers have mostly used a theme and variation and descant/counter melody against melody as the form. Most of the songs in this category usually consist of an eight to twenty measure introduction of the composer’s own creation based on the existing popular/gospel musical type, and a re-arrangement/harmonization of the existing music, a four-part harmony and finally the creation of a descant part/counter melody to the melody, resulting in a piece with an A:B:C form. Exponents of this model are Kwame Nkrumah, OpponKyei, Newlove Annan, OheneAduNti, and James VarrickArmaah. Examples of such works are Kwame Nkrumah’s }y[Nyame (It’s God) which has been arranged from Stella Dugan’s existing gospel song, Newlove Annan’s GyeWoNkoaa (Except for only You) arranged from an existing Pentecostal song, OheneAduNti’s “Holy Ghost Fire” which was arranged from an existing Pentecostal song and James VarrickArmaah’sAyeyiWura(The Lord of Praise) also from an existing Pentecostal song. These new creations have arisen as a result of texts in the original which do not transmit complete and meaningful messages. For example the original AyeyiWura, has the original texts as

AyeyiWura, ayeyiwura	The Owner of Praise, the Owner of Praise
YeyiW’ay[, ye b[ da W’ase	We praise you, we will thank you
AyeyiWura, ayeyiwura	The Owner of Praise the Owner of Praise
YeyiW’ay[, ye b[ da W’ase	We praise you, we will thank you

The purpose of this song is to praise God but what God has done to merit praise is missing from it. Armaah therefore re arranges and incorporates the missing texts, adding

Woamamenyiagye, Woamamoho at]m	You have made me blissful and have set me free.
Munnhundzeameny[munnhundze a mennka	I don’t know how to express it
Me annkamenns[ bi Woama ma s[ bi	I have not been counted worthy of anything better
AyeyiWuraeyeyiW’aye y[b[da W’ase	The owner of praise, we praise you we will thank you

It can be realized that these texts make the song complete and more meaningful.

7.2. *The Extended Form of the Contemporary model*

In the “Extended form” type, the existing song is arranged into a large scale anthem of several measures introducing the song with an aria or duet and making use of combination of varied choirs<sup>7</sup>. In one of the examples of this category, M’akomaAhy[ ma (My heart is filled up) which is based on Mozart’s Requiem, Bach’s Air and a Ghanaian devotional song, Newlove Annan, an inventor of this model, writes for five parts i.e solo against chorus, S.A.T.B, T.T.B.B and also makes use of pivot chord and abrupt modulations. Another exponent is SekyiBaidoo. In his work “Will your anchor hold” based on the Methodist Hymn Book tune number 634, he also makes use of some of the same characteristics enumerated above.

7.3. *Tabular representation of the various choral music models*

- Nketia’s Typology

Choral Music Models				
Choral/Anthem	Traditional	YaaAmponsa/Highlife	Later Highlife	Institutional

Figure 1

- Misonu’s Typology

Choral Music Models		
Anthem/Choral Model	Traditional Model	YaaAmponsa/Later Highlife/Institutional Model

Figure 2

- Andoh’s Typology

Choral Music Models					
Choral or Anthem	Traditional	Highlife/YaaAmponsa	Later Highlife	Institutional	Picnic

Figure 3

<sup>7</sup>SATB,TTBB,SSA SAA

### 8. Explanatory Notes to My Typology

Per these submissions and with respect to arguments made by various scholars and myself, I wish to categorize and present choral music under two broad styles: “The African Choral” and “The Art Choral”. Whilst the African Choral includes the traditional forms of vocal music, the Avihawo, Nnwonkor], the Art Choral music consists of four models as argued out in the present study, namely; The “Anthem” Model, “The Traditional” Model, The “YaaAmponsa/Highlife/Later Highlife and the latest “Contemporary” Model as proposed in the present study.

The Choral Anthem model, the Choral model, or the Anthem model as the label may apply includes compositions written in four-part for S.A.T.Bor T.T.B.B. The Traditional model is characterized with the use of traditional music set in the normal four-part harmony. While The YaaAmponsa/The Highlife model which uses either duple or quadruple time or an alternation of both also set to four-part harmony, the Contemporary model is also of two variants; the Extended type and the Short type and has relied on existing popular/gospel tunes. The extended type is usually an extended form with different vocal textures; solos and duets of an existing tune whilst the Short type is usually with re-arrangements of an existing tune and setting of descants to the tunes. This can be represented graphically as shown below to further simplify the typology of Choral Music models.

- Tabular form of My Typology

African Choral		Art Choral			
Avihawo	Nnwonkor]	Anthem	Traditional	Highlife	Contemporary
					Short   Extended

Figure 4

### 9. Conclusion

Choral music as we know it today is here to stay by virtue of the exertions of the missionaries with the support of our pioneer musicians in Ghana. Before the arrival of the missionaries whose contributions contained premises of choral music in Ghana, there were traditional choral musical styles such as Avihawo and Nnwonkor]. These traditional choral music styles bear almost the same characteristic features as the art choral music. The attempt made by the missionaries through the establishment of churches and schools was a step in the right direction in the development of choral music in Ghana. The Basel and the Methodist missions played a pivotal role in this regard.

In the year 1974 due to the vast array of choral works present, Nketia found it imperative to categorize choral music compositions. Nketia who is the original proponent of the typology of choral music identifies five main formal models of choral music. Misonu agrees with Nketia on the typology but merges the later highlife and the YaaAmponsa models because they bear similar characteristics. Andoh on the other hand suggests a change of the “Choral Anthem” Model to either “Choral model” or “Anthem model” since the two are vocally related. I agree with Andoh in view of the definitions of choral and anthem from The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English and the Encyclopedia Britannica but disagree with his proposal to include a fifth model the “Picnic Model” because the “Picnic Model” is no different in form, harmony, melody to the Highlife model. I have agreed with Amu Misonu for the merging of Later Highlife and YaaAmponsa and have also agreed with Andoh regarding the retention of either “Choral” or “Anthem” because they are vocally related. I have proposed two main types of choral music to include Traditional choral styles which have been termed African model alongside the Art choral, and a fourth model under the art choral, the contemporary model which has two variants: the short and the extended forms.

In brief, Nketia (1994:14) submits that “our primary objective has been to draw attention to the different forms that have emerged as composers use particular models that fascinate them or as they try to find new forms that have not been used.” I have tried to explore other forms to offer composers the exposure to enable them exploit more models. The utilization of more models by composers is what I expect since that would generate interest and attract the patronage of choral groups to performing the works of a particular composer. It is therefore my hope that this review would encourage as many composers as possible to build their repertoire on varied models for choral groups to perform.

### 10. References

1. Amu, M. (1988) Stylistic and textual sources of the contemporary Ghanaian art music composer: Dr. Ephraim Amu. Unpublished master’s thesis, University of Ghana, Legon
2. Andoh, T.E (2008) The Choral Music scene in the Gold Coast (Ghana) prior to 1933, Ghana Bulletin of Theology (N.S), Vol.3 Dec, 2008, pp. 77-110.
3. Andoh, T.E. (1993) An analytical study of the vocal compositions of I.D. Riverson. (Unpublished M.Phil. Thesis) University of Ghana Legon
4. Coplan, D. (1978). Go to my town, Cape Coast! In Bruno Nettl (Ed.), Eight urban musical cultures: The social history of Ghanaian highlife (pp. 96-114). Location: University of Illinois Press
5. Dor, G. W.K (2005) Uses of indigenous music genres in Ghanaian choral art music: Perspectives from the works of Amu, Blege, and Dor. Journal of Ethnomusicology 49, (3).
6. Nketia J.H.K. (1974) The music of Africa. New York: W.W. Norton.
7. Nketia J.H.K (1994) The typology of contemporary Ghanaian choral music. Paper Presented at Composers’ Forum, organized by International Centre for African Music and Dance